MARVEL COMICS GROUP

12¢

the X-MEN

"TO SAVE A CITY!"

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

IND.

23 AUG

ACTION LOVERS! THIS ONE'S FOR YOU!

WWW.MARVEL.COM

(c) 2009 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved.

X-MEN! THE MOST UNUSUAL FIGHTING TEAM OF ALL TIME!

"TO SAVE A CITY"

IT'S ROLLICKIN' RESUMÉ TIME! BUT, INSTEAD OF WASTING A LOT OF SPACE ON WORDY INTRODUCTIONS, LET'S QUICKLY PLUNGE RIGHT IN AND LET THE STORY TELL ITSELF...

IN A FEW MOMENTS--WHILE YOU ARE CHAINED HERE, HELPLESS--I SHALL STEAL THE NATION'S CAPITAL! JUST AS YOU X-MEN FELL BEFORE THE POWER OF THE NEW, REVIVED MAGGIA, SO WILL ALL OF AMERICA SOON GROVEL BEFORE THE MIGHT OF...COUNT NEFARIA!

JOIN ME--AND SHARE MY SUREME TRIUMPH! FOR, IF YOU DO NOT, I SHALL BE FORCED ULTIMATELY TO DESTROY YOU!

WHAT ARE YOU, NEFARIA--SOME KIND OF A NUT? NOBODY COULD POSSIBLY CAPTURE THE ENTIRE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA!

YOUR SUPER-POWERED FLUNKIES MAY HAVE CAPTURED US SEPARATELY, BUT YOU'LL NEVER GET THE X-MEN TO HELP YOU IN YOUR MORONIC PLOT!

WHO IS THIS COUNT NEFARIA? WE'VE NEVER ENCOUNTERED HIM BEFORE!

DON'T BE TOO CERTAIN, ANGEL! THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT HIM THAT MAKES ME SUSPECT HE MAY BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT HIS THREAT!

SO, LET HIM ORATE AWAY, CYCLOPS--WE'RE DEFINITELY A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE!

EDITED IN ECSTASY BY
STAN LEE
WRITTEN IN RAPTURE BY
ROY THOMAS
DRAWN IN DELIGHT BY
WERNER ROTH
DELINEATED IN DEPTH BY
DICK AYERS
LETTERED IN A LAWN-CHAIR BY
ARTIE SIMEK

(c) 2009 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved.

THE BEAST IS CORRECT, MY FRIENDS! FURTHERMORE, YOU HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO AID ME!

FOR, WHETHER YOU DO OR NOT, THE WORLD WILL HOLD YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT GREATEST OF CRIMES!

SO THAT'S YOUR ANGLE--TO FORCE US TO HELP YOU!

THAT STILL DOESN'T EXPLAIN HOW YOU INTEND TO CAPTURE WASHINGTON--THE MOST CAREFULLY GUARDED CITY ON EARTH!

I CHOOSE TO REVEAL NO MORE AT THIS TIME! BUT, REST ASSURED--THE MENACE IS A VERY REAL ONE! REFUSE TO SERVE ME--AND NOT ONLY WILL A MILLION PERSONS BE DOOMED...

--BUT, MOST IRONIC OF ALL, YOU SHALL BE BLAMED FOR IT! MY HANDS WILL BE CLEAN!

AND NOW, I LEAVE YOU TO DECIDE! I SHALL RETURN IN... ONE HOUR!

THAT SANGUINARY LITTLE SCENE SHOULD BRING ALL DELINQUENT MARVELITES UP TO DATE AS PAINLESSLY AS POSSIBLE! AND NOW, WE SWITCH TO THE PRESENT, AS...

LET THE DRAMA BEGIN! THE WORLD SHALL SOON KNOW OF THE IRRESISTIBLE POWER OF COUNT NEFARIA!

FIRST, THE NATION'S CAPITAL MUST BE SEALED OFF FROM ALL OUTSIDE INFLUENCES!

THEN, EVEN AS THE COUNT MANIPULATES THE CONTROLS OF HIS AWESOME INVENTION, THE CITIZENS OF WASHINGTON ARE SUDDENLY STARTLED TO BEHOLD...

WHAT'S THIS? IT CAN'T BE SNOW--NOT IN JUNE!

NO! IT'S COUNTLESS GLOWING PARTICLES, CRYSTALLIZING IN THE AIR! BUT, WHAT CAN IT MEAN?

HOWEVER, THERE IS NO ANSWER EXCEPT SILENCE, AS THE LUMINISCENT FRAGMENTS COMBINE TO FORM A SOLID, ENCOMPASSING DOME ABOUT THE ENTIRE CITY...

HOLY HANNAH! WHERE DID THAT THING COME FROM?

YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE! IT APPEARED JUST AS WE WERE GOING IN FOR A LANDING!

NOBODY CAN GET THRU FROM EITHER SIDE! IS IT SOME NEW PLAN TO MAKE WASHINGTON ATTACK-PROOF?

WELCOME TO WASHINGTON DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

AND, INSIDE THE TRANSPARENT PRISON...

LOOK, OFFICER, IF THIS IS SOME KINDA *ALERT*, HOW LONG IS IT GONNA *LAST*? THIS TRUCK'S LOADED DOWN WITH *PERISHABLE GOODS!*

IF THIS *IS* JUST A TEST, MAC, I DON'T KNOW ANY MORE ABOUT IT THAN *YOU* DO--AND DON'T I WISH I *DID!*

THE CARS ARE BACKED UP FOR *MILES* ALREADY!

MEANWHILE, IN THE CAPITOL BUILDING, AMERICA'S LAW-MAKERS HAVE MUCH MORE ON THEIR MINDS THAN THE *TRAFFIC!*

I DON'T *LIKE* IT! THE PRESIDENT ASSURED US THAT DOME'S NOT OF *OUR* MAKING!

I WONDER--COULD IT BE...*THEIRS?*

WE MUST GET TO THE *BOTTOM* OF THIS, AND *FAST!* I'M CALLING THE *PENTAGON!*

BUT, EVEN AS THE SENATOR DIALS, BOTH THE CIVIL AND MILITARY AUTHORITIES ARE ALREADY ON THE SPOT...

AND I MIGHT AS WELL BE SWINGING A *STRAND OF SPAGHETTI* AS THIS *AX!*

NO GO! THIS PNEUMATIC DRILL WILL CUT *DIAMOND* --BUT IT WON'T EVEN *DENT* THIS STUFF!

ALRIGHT, MEN--THAT'S *ENOUGH!* WE'LL HAVE TO *BLAST* OUR WAY IN!

AND SO, *DYNAMITE* IS TRIED ON THE STRANGE, ALL-ENCOMPASSING DOME--WITH DISCOURAGING RESULTS!

WHROOM!

WE STRUCK OUT *AGAIN!* WHAT'S THAT THING *MADE* OF, ANYWAY?

GENERAL, I'VE GOT A HUNCH THAT NOTHING SHORT OF AN *A-BOMB* IS GOING TO SMASH THRU THAT BARRIER!

YOU MAY BE *RIGHT*, CAPTAIN--

BUT, WE *DARE NOT* USE NUCLEAR WEAPONS WITHOUT KNOWING JUST HOW STRONG THE DOME *IS!* OTHERWISE, THE LOSS IN LIVES AND PROPERTY COULD BE *STAGGERING!*

THEN, WHAT IS THERE LEFT THAT WE *CAN* DO, GENERAL?

NOTHING--EXCEPT SIT AND *WAIT!* I SUSPECT THAT WHOEVER CONSTRUCTED THIS DEVICE WILL GET IN TOUCH WITH *US!*

AND--YOU GUESSED IT, MARVELITE--AT THAT VERY MOMENT...

I HAVE GIVEN WASHINGTON--AND THE *NATION*--LONG ENOUGH TO DETERMINE THAT NOTHING THEY CAN DO WILL RID THEM OF MY *CRYSTALLINE DOME!* NOW, IT IS TIME TO PRESENT MY *DEMANDS!*

FOR, IN SO DOING, I SHALL *FORCE* THE X-MEN TO BECOME MY *ALLIES* IN THIS MOST DARING OF ALL POSSIBLE CRIMES!

BARE SECONDS LATER, ON THE STEPS OF THE CAPITOL, A MOST UNUSUAL SCENE IS ENACTED...

STAND ASIDE, GUARD! WE'VE COME ABOUT THE *SHIELD* WHICH COVERS THE CITY!

THE *X-MEN!* THERE'S A *SPECIAL COMMITTEE* MEETING ABOUT THAT *RIGHT NOW!* GO ON IN!

AFTER SEEING YOU BATTLE THE *SENTINELS**, I'VE A HUNCH IF ANYONE CAN LICK THIS THING --IT'S *YOU!*

*AS RECOUNTED IN *X-MEN* #14-16, INCLUSIVE-- REMEMBER? --*SMILEY.*

THEN--A MIND-STAGGERING *ULTIMATUM!*

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR IMPRISONMENT! YOU WILL ISSUE TO US CERTIFICATES WORTH *ONE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS--AT ONCE!*

OTHERWISE, WITHIN *THREE HOURS*, THE CRYSTALS OF THE DOME WILL ABSORB ALL *OXYGEN* INSIDE IT, AND YOU WILL *DIE!*

WHAT? YOU'RE *MAD!*

WE'RE ONLY *ONE COMMITTEE!* WE'D HAVE TO CALL A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE *ENTIRE CONGRESS--*

THEN *CALL* IT! REMEMBER--YOU HAVE *THREE HOURS!* ONE OF THE X-MEN WILL PICK IT UP FROM YOUR REPRESENTATIVE ON THE CAPITOL STEPS!

HAVE THE MONEY THERE--OR SUFFER THE DIRE *CONSEQUENCES!* AND NOW--GOOD-BYE!

HERE THEY COME! *GRAB* 'EM, EDDIE!

AND, IF YOU THINK WE'RE *BLUFFING*, JUST *TRY* US!

RIGHT! BUT-- THEY'RE *IGNORIN'* US!

HEY! THEY *VANISHED*-- ALL *FIVE* OF 'EM! IS THAT ONE'A THEIR MUTANT POWERS, TOO?

I DON'T KNOW, CHARLIE! BUT WITH THOSE MUTIES, *ANYTHING'S* POSSIBLE! AFTER ALL, THEY AINT REALLY *HUMAN!*

GLEEP!

BUT, WHAT WORRIES *ME* IS-- WHAT'LL HAPPEN TO ALL OF US IF CONGRESS *TURNS DOWN* THEIR DEMAND?

IN THE MEANTIME, WHAT ABOUT OUR *REAL* MUCHLY MISTREATED MUTANTS? LET'S NOT FORGET ABOUT *THEM--*

WE'VE GOT TO GET *FREE*, SOMEHOW!

HOLD ONTO YOUR GOGGLES, CYKE! *MARVEL GIRL'S* GIVING HANK'S CUFFS A GO *TELEKINETICALLY!*

I HOPE SHE *SUCCEEDS!* THEY'RE TOO STRONG FOR MY ICE *POWER* TO AFFECT!

I REALIZE THIS IS HARDLY THE APPROPRIATE TIME--BUT THAT *TICKLES!*

QUIET, ALL OF YOU! I'VE GOT TO HAVE COMPLETE *CONCENTRATION!*

ANY LUCK AT ALL, JEAN?

NEGATIVE, ANGEL--

WHOEVER *DESIGNED* THESE SHACKLES DID SO WITH *ME* IN MIND! THEY'RE TOO COMPLICATED FOR ME TO UNDO WITHOUT FIRST HAVING *STUDIED* THE LOCKS!

IF ONLY WE COULD MANAGE TO MENTALLY CONTACT THE *PROFESSOR!*

BUT, *WHY* CAN'T THE FETTERED CRIMEFIGHTERS CONTACT THEIR LEADER TELEPATHICALLY? WE WERE *HOPING* YOU'D ASK--

I'M ALMOST *GLAD* MY X-MEN ARE HAVING A VACATION JUST NOW--

FOR, THIS NEW INVENTION I'M PERFECTING IS SO IMPORTANT I MUST GIVE IT MY *UNDIVIDED ATTENTION!*

RING

THAT *NOISE!* OH, IT'S JUST THE *TELEPHONE!*

I'VE MENTALLY *SEALED OFF* MY BRAIN, SO THAT WHILE I'M WORKING, EVEN THE *X-MEN* CAN'T CONTACT ME! BUT, I *FORGOT* ABOUT SUCH A MUNDANE THING AS A *TELEPHONE!*

HELLO, GENERAL! NO, AS A MATTER OF FACT, I *HAVEN'T* BEEN LISTENING TO THE RADIO!

WHAT? AN EMERGENCY-- REGARDING THE *X-MEN?* YES, OF COURSE I'LL MEET YOU THERE--WITHIN THE *HOUR!*

THAT WAS *GENERAL FREDRICKS*--WITH WHOM I WORKED AS CIVILIAN ADVISER WHEN WE DEFEATED THE *SENTINELS!*

HE SAYS THAT THE X-MEN ARE THREATENING THE *NATION'S CAPITAL*, AND HOPES THAT I CAN BE OF SOME ASSISTANCE IN *COMBATTING* THEM!

HIS STORY IS *FANTASTIC*--BUT HE CAN'T BE *LYING!* I MUST CONTACT MY STUDENTS!

ATTENTION, *X-MEN*, WHEREVER YOU ARE! CONTACT ME *AT ONCE!* DO YOU *READ* ME?

NO ANSWER WITH MY FIRST TRY! THEY MUST BE SOME DISTANCE *AWAY!* BUT I *WILL* REACH THEM! I *MUST!*

MEANWHILE, IN NEFARIA'S HIDE-OUT NEAR WASHINGTON...

DON'T GIVE UP, MARVEL GIRL! I'VE GOT AN *IDEA!*

IF ONLY YOU COULD *BYPASS* THE METAL BAND ON MY HEAD AND OPEN MY *VISOR* SLIGHTLY, MY POWERFUL EYE BEAMS WOULD FREE US!

I-I'LL *TRY*, SCOTT! BUT, I'M SO *WEAK!*

YOU'VE *GOT* TO TRY, JEAN! THE FATE OF A *CITY* IS AT STAKE!

IT'S *GIVING!* I CAN MENTALLY FEEL THE VISOR *OPENING*, BUT--

THAT *DID* IT! YOU MANAGED TO PRY IT OPEN JUST ENOUGH SO THAT THE ENERGY BEAM FROM MY EYES *FORCED* IT!

I'LL TURN THE BEAM ON MY OWN BONDS, THEN FREE THE *REST* OF YOU!

DON'T TAKE TOO LONG, CYKE! I'M GETTING AWFULLY *TIRED* OF BEING THE POOR MAN'S *PRISONER OF ZENDA!*

NEXT, WITH GRIM RESOLUTENESS, SCOTT SUMMERS SWIFTLY FREES HIS FELLOW X-MEN...

PFAP!

THAT'S MORE *LIKE* IT! NOW, LET'S TACKLE *NEFARIA* AND THOSE CREEPS WHO *CAPTURED* US!

WHAT COULD THE COUNT HAVE MEANT WHEN HE SAID WE WOULD *HAVE* TO JOIN HIM?

WE CAN'T BE *SURE*, JEAN--

BUT, MY GUESS IS THAT HE'S IN THE PROCESS OF *FRAMING* US FOR WHATEVER COLOSSAL CRIME HE'S COMMITTING--FIGURING THAT, AS *OUTCASTS*, WE WILL HAVE NO ONE TO TURN BUT *HIM!*

HOLD STILL, HANK, AND-- *THERE!*

MANY THANKS, LOQUACIOUS LEADER! BUT, WHY MUST THE LONG-SUFFERING *BEAST* ALWAYS BE LEFT TO *LAST?*

OH WELL--C'EST LA VIE, AS THEY SAY!

NOW COMES THE *GOOD* PART! WAIT'LL I PUT THE ICE-COLD KIBOSH ON THAT SLIPPERY *EEL!*

WAIT, BOBBY! LISTEN, ALL OF YOU--WE'RE BEING CONTACTED MENTALLY BY THE *PROFESSOR!* I HAD A *HUNCH* HE'D FIND US SOONER OR LATER!

ATTENTION, X-MEN! THIS IS *PROFESSOR XAVIER!* I HAVE JUST PROBED YOUR LOCATION TELEPATHICALLY, AND AM READY WITH YOUR *INSTRUCTIONS--*

FIRE WHEN READY, SIR! WE'RE ALL *EARS!*

AND SO IT IS THAT, A SHORT TIME LATER, AS THE MALEVOLENT *MASTER OF DREAMS* ELATEDLY OBSERVES A GIANT TELE-SCREEN...

THEY'VE *DONE* IT! THEY'VE AGREED TO MY *TERMS!*

THE SENATE HAS JUST VOTED A *SPECIAL APPROPRIATION*--TO BE PICKED UP BY THE *X-MEN* AT THE EXPIRATION OF THE THREE-HOUR PERIOD!

THAT'S FINE AND DANDY WITH *US*, NEFARIA!

OUR ONLY QUESTION IS--WHAT'S OUR *PERCENTAGE* OF THE TAKE?

THE *X-MEN!* HOW--?

NEVER MIND *THAT*, COUNT! LET'S JUST SAY WE WISED UP, AND LET IT GO AT THAT!

AFTER ALL, AS YOU SAID, THE HUMANS *HATE* US! WHY *SHOULDN'T* WE GET REVENGE ON THEM --AND MAKE MONEY AT THE SAME TIME?!

A MOST SAGACIOUS DECISION, MY FRIENDS--

BUT, LET ME WARN YOU OF ONE SMALL *DETAIL!*

I HAVE DESIGNED THE *CRYSTALLINE DOME* IN SUCH A WAY THAT ONLY *I* CAN MANIPULATE THE DIALS TO *DISSIPATE* IT!

IF ANYONE ELSE TRIES, HE WILL BRING *TOTAL ANNIHILATION* TO YOUR CAPITAL!

REMEMBER THAT--IN CASE YOU HARBOR ANY FOOLISH CONCEPTIONS ABOUT *DECEIVING* ME!

THEN, AFTER THE COUNT EXPLAINS HIS SCHEME...

INTO THIS *TRUCK!* IT WILL TAKE YOU TO A LOCATION WHERE YOU CAN *ENTER* THE TRAPPED CITY!

NEFARIA'S SO *CONFIDENT!* I HOPE THE PROF KNOWS WHAT HE'S *DOING!*

DRIVEN TO THE SCENE IN A COMMON *MILK TRUCK!* HOW *PLEBEIAN!*

BUT, AS SOON AS THE X-MEN ARE HAULED AWAY...

READY WITH *PLAN "C"!* COMMENCE-- *NOW!*

INSTANTLY, FROM ANOTHER PART OF THE COUNT'S INNOCENT-LOOKING HEADQUARTERS, A *SECOND* VEHICLE DEPARTS AT TOP SPEED...

AND, PASSING THE BOGUS *"MILK TRUCK"*, IT DEPOSITS ITS UNSAVORY PASSENGERS AT THE OUTER RIM OF THE DOME BEFORE THE X-MEN ARRIVE...

SO--IT IS *AGREED!* WE SHALL SERVE COUNT NEFARIA *NO MORE!*

THAT FOOL! HE HAS SENT US TO WATCH THE X-MEN--TO BE CERTAIN THAT THEY DO NOT ATTEMPT ANY *TRICKERY!*

EVEN HE DOES NOT SUSPECT THAT WE--HIS *LIEUTENANTS* IN THE NEW *MAGGIA*-- INTEND TO SEIZE THE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS FOR *OURSELVES!*

BUT NOW--OUT OF *SIGHT!* THE MUTANTS WILL BE HERE AT ANY MOMENT!

DON'T BE TOO FAST TO ORDER US AROUND, UNICORN! REMEMBER, YOU ARE ONLY OUR *PROVISIONAL* LEADER!

PLANTMAN SPEAKS THE *TRUTH!* FOR, IF YOUR PLAN *FAILS*--

THEN ONE OF *US* BECOMES THE LEADER-- AND I KNOW WHICH ONE *I'D* VOTE FOR!

*MEANWHILE, JUST TO GET THINGS *REALLY* COMPLICATED, PROFESSOR X ARRIVES JUST OUTSIDE WASHINGTON...*

AND THAT'S THE STORY, XAVIER! WE WERE HOPING THAT YOU, AS AN ACKNOWLEDGED EXPERT ON MUTANTS, COULD TELL US HOW THEY MIGHT HAVE CREATED THAT INFERNAL DOME!

IF ONLY HE REALIZED *WHY* I'M AN EXPERT ON MUTANTS, HE'D BE AFTER *MY* SCALP, AS WELL!

I'LL DO ALL I CAN, GENERAL!

BUT, ARE YOU *CERTAIN* THAT THE X-MEN ARE BEHIND THIS? COULD SOMEONE BE *FRAMING* THEM?

TAKE YOUR STATIONS, MEN! WE'VE GOT TO BE READY FOR *ANYTHING!*

FRAMING THEM? THE RADIO REPORTS COMING OUT OF WASHINGTON VERIFIED THAT THOSE BLASTED MUTANTS WALKED RIGHT INTO THE CAPITOL AND *DEMANDED* WE RANSOM THE CITY-- *OR ELSE!*

I KNOW, FROM MY PRELIMINARY MENTAL PROBING, THAT THOSE WERE ONLY *IMAGES* CREATED BY *COUNT NEFARIA* --BUT I CAN'T PROVE IT FOR NOW, SO--

I'M SORRY, GENERAL! YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE! IF YOU'LL JUST GIVE ME A FEW MINUTES TO DO SOME *THINKING* ON THE MATTER--

ALL RIGHT--BUT YOU'D BETTER THINK *FAST!* IF THOSE MUTANTS CAN SEIZE THE NATION'S CAPITAL, THEN NO PLACE ON *EARTH* IS SAFE FROM THEM!

I HATED TO DISAPPOINT THE GENERAL'S *FAITH* IN ME, BUT I HAD TO GET HIM TO LEAVE ME *ALONE* FOR A WHILE...

LOOK AT THAT, BILL! OUR "*MUTANT EXPERT*" HAS GONE TO *SLEEP!* TOO MUCH EXCITEMENT, I GUESS!

YEAH! THE POOR GUY!

IT'S TIME FOR MY INVISIBLE *ASTRAL IMAGE* TO GO TO WORK--

IT IS ONLY IN *THIS* FORM, IN WHICH I HAVE NO SOLID SUBSTANCE, THAT I CAN KNOW ANYTHING LIKE THE THRILL OF *WALKING* AGAIN!

BUT, NO TIME TO THINK OF THAT *NOW!* I'M APPROACHING COUNT NEFARIA'S *STRONGHOLD!*

THOUGH THE X-MEN ARE NO LONGER HERE, THEIR *EMANATIONS* REMAIN--SO I KNOW THAT THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE I CONTACTED THEM *EARLIER!*

AND THAT MUST BE *NEFARIA* HIMSELF! I CANNOT PHYSICALLY *ACT* WHILE I AM IN MY ASTRAL BODY, BUT I CAN OBSERVE--AND *LEARN!*

AH--THE PANEL TRUCK CARRIES THE X-MEN PAST THE FINAL UNSUSPECTING SOLDIERS! AT LAST, MY MONTHS OF PLANNING BEGIN TO BEAR *FRUIT!*

NOW, TO CREATE A MOMENTARY *OPENING* IN THE DOME, THRU WHICH THE MUTANTS CAN PASS TO COLLECT THE *RANSOM!*

WITH THE MONEY, I SHALL RETURN TO MY CASTLE IN *CENTRAL EUROPE!*

THERE, I'LL RE-BUILD THE *MAGGIA* INTO THE MOST POWERFUL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION ON EARTH! THEN I SHALL DEAL IN *BILLIONS*, NOT *MILLIONS!*

HE MUST BE *STOPPED!* BUT *HOW?*

BUT, AS PROFESSOR X PONDERS THIS PERPLEXING PROBLEM, WE KNOW HOW EAGER YOU ARE TO GET BACK TO OUR HARASSED HEROES, AND SO...

WELL, HERE WE ARE--BUT WHERE'S THE *ENTRANCE* TO THE DOME THAT NEFARIA PROMISED US?

DON'T WORRY, ANGEL! IF HE *CREATED* THE DOME, I'M SURE HE CAN *CONTROL* IT!

HEY, GROUP! LOOK ALIVE! SOMETHING'S *HAPPENING!*

AS SO OFTEN IN THE PAST, BOBBY BOY, YOU'VE PUT YOUR FROST-BITTEN FINGER RIGHT ON THE *CRUX* OF THE MATTER! SOMETHING'S HAPPENING, *INDEED!*

A SMALL *HOLE* SUDDENLY APPEARED--JUST BIG ENOUGH FOR ALL OF US TO PASS THRU!

AND NOW IT'S CLOSING *BEHIND* US! YOU GOTTA ADMIT--THIS NEFARIA COOKIE REALLY KNOWS HIS *STUFF!*

THIS IS NO TIME TO START *ADMIRING* THE COUNT, ICEMAN! REMEMBER--WE'RE ON *OPPOSITE SIDES!*

IS THAT WHY WE'RE PICKING UP A KING'S RANSOM FOR HIM? ALL *MY* ENEMIES SHOULD BE SO BENEVOLENT!

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

AS THE RELUCTANT RENEGADES RACE THRU THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY, THEY PAY NO ATTENTION AS THEIR PROGRESS IS CAREFULLY MONITORED...

BAKER TO ABLE! BAKER TO ABLE! X-MEN NOW PASSING POINT "Y" ON SCHEDULE, HEADED TOWARDS CAPITOL BUILDING!

THIS WAY, MY COSTUMED COMPEERS! LET THE BOUNDING BEAST'S INFALLIBLE SENSE OF DIRECTION LEAD THE WAY!

THEY WOULD BE CONSIDERABLY MORE UPSET, HOWEVER, IF THEY KNEW OF FIVE MORE SINISTER PAIRS OF EYES THAT GAZE UPON THEM, GREEDILY...

WHEN DO WE MAKE OUR MOVE, UNICORN? SHOULD WE FOLLOW THEM TO THE CAPITOL?

PATIENCE, YOU OVERGROWN WEED! THERE IS NO NEED FOR SUCH HASTE!

SURE! LET THE X-MEN DO OUR DIRTY WORK FOR US! THEN, WE'LL STEP IN AND RELIEVE THEM OF THE MONEY!

AND, BEST OF ALL, IT IS THEY WHO WILL BE SOUGHT BY THE POLICE, NOT WE!

A FEW BRIEF MINUTES LATER, ON THE STEPS OF THE BUILDING IN WHICH AMERICA'S LAWS ARE ENACTED...

THESE SPECIAL, LARGE-DENOMINATION CERTIFICATES ARE REDEEMABLE IN GOLD ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD!

LUCKILY, THEY HAPPENED TO BE READILY AVAILABLE --OR WE COULD NEVER HAVE MET THE MUTANTS' DEADLINE!

BUT-- WHERE ARE THEY? IT'S ALMOST TIME!

THE NEXT INSTANT...

SORRY IF I'M LATE, CONGRESSMAN! STRATEGY CONFERENCE, YOU KNOW!

WHAT--? THE ANGEL!

I'LL JUST RELIEVE YOU OF THIS LITTLE BRIEFCASE, IF YOU DON'T MIND!

NO NEED TO FLY AN EVASION COURSE-- THIS PART OF THE JOB'S A BREEZE!

THIS MAY BE THE BLACKEST DAY IN HISTORY!

THE U.S.-- FORCED TO RANSOM ITS OWN CAPITAL!

THEN, AS THE HIGH-FLYING ANGEL STREAKS UPWARD...

NOW, I'LL REJOIN THE OTHERS, AND--HEY! SOME EAGER-BEAVER'S TAKING POT-SHOTS AT ME!

DON'T WORRY, CONGRESSMAN! I'LL BRING THE THIEF DOWN!

GUARD, WAIT! DON'T--!

SOMEONE MUST HAVE NEGLECTED TO BRIEF THAT GUARD! IF HE SHOOTS THE ANGEL, IT MAY MEAN THE DOOM OF THE CITY!

SORRY, PAL, BUT I'M AFRAID I'M GONNA HAVE TO PUT YOUR TRIGGER-FINGER OUT OF COMMISSION FOR A LITTLE WHILE!

MY GUN HAND-- IT'S ENCASED IN ICE!

YOU WIN THE CIGAR, CHUM! AND AREN'T YOU LUCKY I'M NOT THE HUMAN TORCH!

THANKS, BOBBY! NOW TO HEAD BACK TO THE PERIMETER OF THE CITY!

PICKING UP THE MONEY WAS *KID STUFF!* WHEN DO WE GET SOME *ACTION?*

SO FAR, EVERYTHING'S ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE! STILL, I WISH THE *PROFESSOR* WERE HERE!

I'M SURE HE'S KEEPING TABS ON US *MENTALLY*, JEAN! BESIDES, LET'S SHOW HIM WHAT WE CAN DO ON OUR *OWN!*

CHEER UP, ROBERT, M'LAD! WE'RE NOT HOME FREE *YET!*

YOU CAN SAY *THAT* AGAIN, HANK! LOOK--UP AHEAD! SOME OF THE *POPULACE* HAS TURNED OUT TO GREET US!

THERE'RE THOSE CRUMMY MUTIES! C'MON, MEN--LET'S SHOW 'EM WHAT WE THINK OF *TRAITORS!*

AND I'LL BET THEY'RE NOT HERE TO GIVE US THE *KEYS TO THE CITY!*

DANGER

WE'RE WITH *YOU*, BUDDY!

HEY--THAT WAS *CLOSE!* AND--I DROPPED THE BRIEFCASE WITH THE *MONEY!*

SWISHH!

JUST *OUR* LUCK THOSE GUYS HADDA BE NEAR A *PILE OF BRICKS* WHEN THEY SPOTTED US!

DON'T WORRY, WARREN! *I'VE* GOT IT!

ALAS, WHY MUST THE AGILE BEAST BE CONSTANTLY A TARGET FOR *MISDIRECTED HOSTILITIES?*

THAK!

ZIK!

ALL OF YOU--USE *DEFENSIVE MEASURES ONLY!* WE CAN'T HARM THESE PEOPLE JUST BECAUSE THEY THINK WE'RE *CROOKS!*

BUT, WE CAN'T DELAY *TOO LONG!*

PTHUD!

THAT'S FOR SURE! IF COUNT NEFARIA GETS TOO *IMPATIENT*, HE'LL CAUSE HIS KOOKIE DOME TO ABSORB THE CITY'S *OXYGEN!*

MEANWHILE, A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY...

IT'S TIMES LIKE THIS I'M *REALLY* GLAD I HAVE WINGS!

BUT--OVER THERE! A BUNCH OF THEM HAVE HANK *SURROUNDED!*

HANG ON, BEAST! I'M ON MY WAY!

COME AT YOUR OWN CHOSEN SPEED, ANGEL!

IN THE MEANTIME, I'LL JUST SCRAMBLE UP THIS *IMPOSING EDIFICE* HERE, AND ENJOY THE *VIEW!*

HE'S CLIMBING UP THE *WASHINGTON MONUMENT!* STOP HIM!

NOW? HE'S LIKE A BLASTED *MONKEY!*

ON CAREFUL RECONSIDERATION, WARREN, PERHAPS I'D BEST ACCEPT YOUR GENEROUS OFFER *AFTER ALL!*

GOING MY WAY?

JUST SO HAPPENS I *AM*, BEAST! BUT, WHAT ABOUT THE *OTHERS?* I CAN'T CARRY THEM ALL AT ONCE!

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

BUT, EXACTLY TEN SECONDS LATER, *HELP* ARRIVES --FROM A MOST UNEXPECTED *QUARTER!*

NO *WONDER* THOSE MUTANT MASQUERADERS HADN'T ARRIVED BACK AT THE DOME YET! SOME PANICKY *CITIZENS* ARE ATTACKING THEM!

WE MUST *AID* THEM--SO THAT WE CAN RELIEVE THEM OF THAT *BRIEFCASE!* *QUICKLY!*

AND SO, EACH OF THE COSTUMED CRIMINALS LENDS A HAND--IN HIS OWN COLORFUL WAY!

TO THE RESCUE, MY PRETTIES! THINK OF ALL THE *BIRDSEED* THAT YOUR SHARE OF THE LOOT WILL BUY!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK HAS NOTHING ON...THE *SCARECROW!*

LOOK OUT! A BUNCH OF CROWS --*SWOOP-ING* AT US!

OWWW!

VERY CLEVER, MY STRAW-STUFFED ASSOCIATE!

BUT, THE *PORCUPINE* HAS EVEN *MORE* EFFECTIVE WAYS OF DEALING WITH INTRUDERS!

FIST!

=AAAGH!= *TEAR GAS!*

YOU'RE *BOTH* BEING TOO GENTLE WITH THEM! LET THE *EEL* SHOW YOU HOW IT'S DONE!

ZAP!

=YIPE!= ELECTRICAL BLASTS! ARE *THEY* A BUNCH OF MUTANTS, *TOO?*

OF *COURSE* WE ARE, FOOLS! DID YOU THINK WE'D LET OUR FELLOW MUTANTS FALL BEFORE MERE *HOMO SAPIENS?*

HOW BEAUTI-FULLY *IRONIC!* THE X-MEN WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE EVEN FOR *OUR* ACTS!

FRAP!

FOR, UNLIKE THEM, WE'VE NO SCRUPLES AGAINST *HARMING* PEOPLE!

ALRIGHT, NOW THAT EACH OF YOU HAS *HAD* HIS LITTLE FUN, IT'S TIME FOR THE *PLANTMAN* TO STEP IN AND FINISH UP THIS LITTLE MELODRAMA!

THESE LEAFY FRIENDS OF MINE OUGHT TO TAKE SOME OF THE *FIGHT* OUT OF *OUR* ATTACKERS!

SWOOSH!

RUN! HOW CAN WE FIGHT SOMEBODY WHO CAN MAKE *TREES* COME TO LIFE?

SWOOSH!

LET THE *ARMY* TAKE CARE OF EM! I'M GETTIN' *OUTTA* HERE!

WELL DONE! THEY FLEE LIKE THE *CURS* THAT THEY ARE!

LET THEM GO! WE HAVE WASTED *ENOUGH* TIME ON THEM! OUR BUSINESS IS WITH THE *X-MEN*-- AND THAT *BRIEFCASE!*

X-MEN--*THIS WAY!* COUNT NEFARIA'S OPENING AN *ESCAPE HATCH* FOR US!

HURRY--BEFORE IT *CLOSES* AGAIN, AND WE'RE *TRAPPED* IN HERE!

ANY PORT IN A STORM, ICEMAN! BUT, KEEP YOUR *GUARD* UP! I'VE GOT A HUNCH WE MAY BE IN FOR *TROUBLE!*

LOOK! IT'S THE CREEPS WHO *CAPTURED* US!*

*LAST ISH--STAN.

THE NEXT MOMENT, AS TEN FLEET FORMS PLUNGE SWIFTLY THRU THE OPENING...

WE *MADE* IT! AND IT'S CLOSING UP *BEHIND* US!

AND NOW, CYCLOPS, I'LL TAKE THAT *POUCH*, IF YOU DON'T MIND! COUNT NEFARIA SENT US TO PICK IT UP FOR HIM!

SORRY, UNICORN, BUT WE'RE DELIVERING THIS LITTLE BUNDLE TO THE COUNT *PERSONALLY!* IF HE HAD WANTED YOU TO HAVE IT, HE'D HAVE *TOLD* US!

BLAST YOU! YOU HAVE HAD YOUR CHANCE TO SURRENDER THE MONEY *PEACEFULLY*--NOW YOU WILL SUFFER THE *CONSEQUENCES!*

OH OH! LOOKS AS IF THESE COSTUMED CLOWNS ARE PLANNING A KING-SIZE *DOUBLE-CROSS*--AND *WE'RE* FORCED TO HELP *NEFARIA!*

PERHAPS--FOR THE *MOMENT!* BUT, THERE ARE *OTHER* WAYS!

IT'S A *STALEMATE*, HORN-TOP! *YOUR* RAY-BEAM AGAINST *MINE!*

ZAP!

EEL! THE REST OF YOU! GET THEM!

BEAST! CATCH THIS AND *RUN*, WHILE I KEEP *UNICORN* BUSY!

WILL DO, CYKE!

NOT SO *FAST*, MY APE-LIKE FRIEND! I HAVE BUT TO TOUCH THE STUDS ON MY WEAPONS BELT, AND THIS *LIQUID CEMENT* WILL STOP YOU IN YOUR TRACKS!

SLOOSH!

HMMM! YOU KNOW, YOU MAY JUST HAVE A *POINT* THERE!

I WAS MOVING *TOO FAST*--CAN'T REVERSE IN TIME TO AVOID GETTING SPLATTERED WITH THAT *GLUE!*

HAVE NO FEAR, BEASTIE--*ICEMAN* IS HERE!

WHAT--? AN *ICY SHIELD*--BLOCKING MY CEMENT!

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR TIMELY ASSISTANCE, LAD!

STILL, IF YOU WON'T TAKE OFFENSE AT A FRIENDLY SUGGESTION, YOUR ATTEMPTS AT *RHYMED REPARTEE* STILL LEAVE MUCH TO BE DESIRED!

WHILE YOU TWO PRATTLE, I'LL GET TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM--AND TO THAT BRIEFCASE, AS WELL!

=OOOF!= HOW IGNOMINIOUS!

TRIPPED UP--AND TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF A PUN, YET!

DON'T LET IT WORRY YOU, BEAST! THE FLYING PART OF OUR LITTLE TEAM WILL TAKE OVER NOW!

THERE AREN'T ANY PLANTS IN THE SKY TO GET IN MY WAY!

IT'S FUNNY--A HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS IN CERTIFICATES INSIDE THIS POUCH--AND WE TOSS IT BACK AND FORTH LIKE A PING-PONG BALL!

PERHAPS I CAN'T STOP YOU, ANGEL--BUT SOMEONE ELSE CAN!

AN INSTANT LATER, BEFORE WARREN CAN DART TO SAFETY...

=UHHHN!= I WAS OVER-CONFIDENT, AS USUAL! I FORGOT ABOUT SCARECROW'S BLASTED TRAINED BIRDS!

SUCH A PITY, MY FEATHERED FRIEND! BUT, I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT FOR YOU!

BEING ATTACKED--FROM ALL SIDES! I CAN'T HOLD ON TO THE MONEY!

VERY KIND OF YOU, SCARECROW! HOWEVER, I THINK IT MIGHT BE WISER IF I JUST GUIDE IT TO MYSELF TELEKINETICALLY! DON'T YOU AGREE?

THERE! I KNEW YOU'D SEE IT MY WAY!

ANOTHER ONE! DON'T YOU COSTUMED JUVENILE DELINQUENTS EVER GIVE UP?

THEY DON'T HAVE TO, STRAWFACE--

--NOT AS LONG AS THE EEL IS AROUND TO DEFEAT THEM!

=OHHH!= THAT DAZZLING LIGHT!

I MAKE IT A POINT NEVER TO HARM A LADY--AT LEAST, NOT AS LONG AS A BLINDING FLASH OF ELECTRICITY WILL ACCOMPLISH THE SAME ENDS!

SO, I'LL JUST TAKE THAT POUCH, AND--UNICORN! WHAT ARE YOU--?

=AAARR!=

ZOT

YOU AND THE OTHERS ARE ALL FOOLS, EEL! DID YOU THINK THAT I INTENDED TO SHARE THIS PRIZE WITH THE LIKES OF YOU?

BUT, SINCE YOU HELPED ME ATTAIN IT, I SHALL MERELY STUN YOU INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS!

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

AND, SOME MILES AWAY, OBSERVING HIS HENCHMAN'S AVARICIOUS ACTIONS, IS A SOMEWHAT LESS-THAN-ECSTATIC *COUNT NEFARIA*...

SO--HE THINKS I CAN BE THUS *TRIFLED WITH*, DOES HE? HE SHALL *PAY* FOR HIS TREACHERY!

SECONDS LATER, BEFORE THE UNCANNY SUPER-VILLAIN CAN MAKE HIS ESCAPE, HE FINDS HIMSELF HEMMED IN BY...

THE *X-MEN!* AND A SQUADRON OF *ARMY TANKS*--SUDDENLY APPEARING OUT OF THAT FOG BANK!

LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE *SURROUNDED*, UNICORN!

WHY NOT SIMPLY RELINQUISH THAT BRIEFCASE, SO WE CAN SETTLE THIS MATTER *AMICABLY?*

NEVER! NOT SO LONG AS MY *POWER HORN* HAS ENERGY LEFT TO *DESTROY* THE ACCURSED TANKS! BUT *WAIT*--WHAT'S THIS?

THEY *FADE AWAY* AS MY BEAM TOUCHES THEM! THEY ARE ONLY *IMAGES*--- CREATED BY NEFARIA TO *CONFOUND* ME!

THEN, BEFORE THE STARTLED EYES OF THE TEEN-AGE HEROES...

I'LL NEVER CATCH HIM AT THAT SPEED! HE'LL BE OUT OF SIGHT IN *SECONDS!*

HE'S FLYING--USING TINY ROCKET-LIFTS IN HIS *BOOTS!*

BUT WE CAN'T QUIT *NOW!* WE'VE *GOT* TO GET HIM!

RIGHT YOU ARE, BOBBY! *LET'S GO!*

WE'LL RETURN TO OUR QUANDARY-STRUCK QUINTET IN A FEW PANELS! BUT FIRST, LET'S SEE HOW PROFESSOR X HAS BEEN SPENDING THESE FAST, FRANTIC MINUTES...

IT'S BEEN *THREE HOURS*, GENERAL--AND THE CITY IS STILL *UNHARMED!*

I *SUSPECTED* AS MUCH! THE WHOLE THING WAS A *FRAUD*--DREAMED UP BY THE MUTANTS TO *ROB* US!

DON'T BE TOO *SURE*, GENERAL! I--

SORRY, PROFESSOR XAVIER, BUT I'VE GOT NO TIME TO GAB WITH YOU *NOW!* I'M GOING TO ORDER THE X-MEN *SHOT ON SIGHT!*

THEN YOU WON'T NEED *MY* SERVICES ANY LONGER! I'LL BE *GOING*...

A FEW MINUTES LATER, AT A SWANK MOTEL NEARBY...

HERE'S YOUR *KEY*, SIR! ISN'T IT TERRIBLE ABOUT THE CITY BEING *ENCASED*, AND ALL?

ER, YES, *QUITE!* NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME...

I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOUR MAN WOULD WHEEL ME TO MY ROOM AT ONCE! I'M REALLY VERY *EXHAUSTED!*

WHAT A *COLD FISH!* THREE QUARTERS OF A MILLION PEOPLE IN MORTAL DANGER--AND ALL HE WANTS TO DO IS *SLEEP!*

AND NOW--SEE? WE *TOLD* YOU WE'D PICK UP ON THE *ACTION* RIGHT AWAY...

ZISH!

WHAT? *AGAIN* THE ARMY APPEARS ON THE SCENE, BEFORE I HAVE GONE A *HUNDRED YARDS* IN THE AIR!

DOES NEFARIA THINK I AM A *FOOL*, TO BE DECEIVED *TWICE* BY HIS SUBTERFUGE?

THAT MUST BE ONE OF THE *MUTANTS!* HE HAS THE *BRIEFCASE!* FIRE AT *WILL!*

-UNNNHH!-

BLAM

I GHOULD HAVE *KNOWN!* THIS TIME THE ARMORED UNIT WAS *REAL!*

MY ENERGY FIELD *PROTECTED* ME--BUT I LOST THE POUCH IN THE *CONCUSSION!*

LUCKILY, HE WAS STRUCK BEFORE HE GOT VERY *FAR!*

BUT, EVEN AS THEIR DEPUTY LEADER GRASPS THE PLUMMETING POUCH, THE X-MEN HAVE *OTHER* THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT...

I DON'T *GET* IT, CAPTAIN! IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE FIGHTING AMONG *THEMSELVES!*

YOU DIDN'T ENLIST TO *UNDERSTAND,* CORPORAL! JUST DUCK IN THAT TANK AND *FIRE!*

THAT GOES FOR *YOU, TOO,* SOLDIER!

YES, *SIR!*

ALL RIGHT, MEN--GET READY! WE'LL TEACH THOSE MUTANTS TO--

HEY! WHAT *GIVES?* THE GUN-BARREL'S *FROZEN SOLID!*

SORRY, DOGFACES! WE'RE ALL FOR *TARGET PRACTICE*-- BUT NOT WHEN WE'RE THE *TARGET!*

GREAT GOING, ICEMAN! MEANWHILE, I'LL HANDLE *THESE* LADS IN MY *OWN* INIMITABLE STYLE!

WHAT'S *WRONG,* BOYS? A FELLA'D THINK YOU NEVER SAW A *WHITE-FEATHERED CRIME-BUSTER* BEFORE!

SCATTER! ONE OF 'EM IS *DIVE-BOMBIN'* US!

SOMEBODY GET A *BEAD* ON THAT FLYING FREAK!

FLYING FREAK, DID YOU SAY?

IT GRIEVES ME TO THE *QUICK* TO HEAR YOU THUS DISPARAGE MY *AVIAN ASSOCIATE!*

SPLAT!

WHAT THE--?

KTHANK!

-OOOOF!- THEY'RE COMIN' AT US FROM *ALL SIDES!*

MEANWHILE, NOT FAR AWAY, SCOTT SUMMERS HAS REACHED THE SIDE OF MARVEL GIRL...

TAKE THE BRIEFCASE TO THE RENDEZVOUS POINT, JEAN! I'LL STAY HERE AND HELP THE OTHERS!

I DON'T LIKE TO LEAVE YOU--AND THE REST OF THE X-MEN--BUT I KNOW I MUST!

HOWEVER, UNKNOWN TO THE GRIM CYCLOPS, A SECOND GROUP OF GROUND TROOPS IS APPROACHING THE AREA OF BATTLE, FROM BEHIND...

LOOK! CYCLOPS IS GIVING THE MONEY TO THE GIRL! LET'S GO GET IT!

OKAY, MEN--OUR ORDERS ARE TO CAPTURE THE X-MEN--DEAD OR ALIVE!

THOSE COSTUMED KOOKS UP AHEAD AREN'T THEM--BUT THEY SURE AREN'T HERE JUST TO SEE THE SCENERY! LET'S TAKE 'EM IN FOR QUESTIONING!

OH OH! HERE COMES TROUBLE!

WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LET OURSELVES BE STOPPED NOW!

AND, AMPLY WARNED AS THEY ARE, THE "COSTUMED KOOKS" PROVE EASIER TO HAVE THAN TO HOLD...

WATCH IT! THESE BIRDS ARE MURDER!

WATCH IT, YOU GUYS! THE EDGES OF THIS BUZZARD'S QUILLS ARE RAZOR-SHARP!

QUITE SO! THE PORCUPINE DOES NOT TAKE KINDLY TO BEING APPREHENDED--FOR ANY REASON!

ALRIGHT, PAL, NOW WE'VE GOTCHA, AND--

HOLY COW! HE BROKE FREE!

HUH? THAT CHARACTER GOT BY ALL THREE OF US!

I'M SLIPPERY AS AN EEL, YOU MIGHT SAY--THANKS TO A SPECIAL SILICON COATING ON MY COSTUME!

OF COURSE, CLOWNS! I AM ALSO AN EXPERT ESCAPE ARTIST--NOT A MERE TRAINER OF BIRDS!

WELL, WE'VE GOT 'EM--NOW WHAT DO WE DO WITH 'EM?

THE SOLDIERS MOMENTARILY OVER-LOOKED ME, BECAUSE OF MY CAMOUFLAGING OUTFIT!

THAT GIVES ME JUST THE TIME I NEED--TO GROW MY OWN ARMY!

PRECISELY TEN SECONDS LATER...

A JUNGLE--APPEARING OUT OF NOWHERE!

GET BACK INSIDE THE TANK, CHARLIE! WE'LL HAVE TO FIGHT OUR WAY OUT OF THIS STUFF!

WELL DONE, PLANT-MAN! THOSE WEEDS YOU ENLARGED AND BROUGHT TO LIFE WILL KEEP THEM BUSY WHILE WE ESCAPE!

OF COURSE! BESIDES, WE HAVE COMMITTED NO REAL CRIME HERE!

BUT, THE X-MEN HAVE ESCAPED--WITH THE LOOT!

AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THE UNICORN?

WELL, MARVELITES, WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED OUR LITTLE SUNDAY ROMP WITH NEFARIA'S MASQUERADING MINIONS, BECAUSE THAT'S ALL YOU'RE GONNA *SEE* OF 'EM--FOR *NOW*, ANYWAY! MEANWHILE, SOME DISTANCE AWAY...

THERE GOES OUR *TRUCK*, BACK TO NEFARIA'S HIDEOUT!

IT LOOKS LIKE THE COUNT'S *LOST INTEREST* IN US, NOW THAT HE HAS HIS HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS!

DON'T WORRY --HE'S NOT GETTING RID OF US *THAT* EASILY! FOLLOW THE TRUCK, ANGEL!

;SIGH!= EITHER WAY, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT WE MUST *MOOF IT* BACK!

AND, WHILE WE'RE TYING UP LOOSE ENDS, LET'S NOT FORGET THE UNCANNY *UNICORN*, WHO IS STILL IN THE VICINITY...

LUCKILY, I FELL INTO THESE *BUSHES* WHEN I WAS CAUGHT OFF-GUARD BY THAT EXPLODING SHELL!

I HAVEN'T MUCH POWER LEFT IN MY ROCKET-SOLED SHOES, SO I'D BETTER LIE LOW UNTIL THE *TROOPS* HAVE LEFT THE AREA!

AT THIS MOMENT, SEVERAL MILES FROM WASHINGTON...

ANY MINUTE NOW, THE TRUCK WILL RETURN-- BRINGING ME THE INFINITE *WEALTH* I NEED!

THEN WHEN I USE THAT MONEY TO RE-ESTABLISH THE *MAGGIA*, THE WORLD WILL KNOW THE GREATEST CRIME WAVE IN ITS *HISTORY!*

BUT, EVEN AS THE CONFIDENT COUNT SPEAKS, A *NEW* ELEMENT ENTERS HIS FATEFUL GAME--AN ELEMENT WHOSE EXISTENCE HE HAS NOT *SUSPECTED!*

AWRIGHT, BUSTER--WHERE DO YA THINK *YER* GOIN'? *NOBODY* GITS THRU THIS GATE!

STEP ASIDE, UNDERLINGS! I HAVE NO WISH TO *HARM* YOU!

I HAVE BUSINESS WITH YOUR *MASTER*-- THE ONE WHO DWELLS *INSIDE!*

THIS IS JUST A *WAREHOUSE*, BUDDY! *NOBODY* LIVES HERE! SO--;UHH!=

;MMMF!= HEY--I CAN'T *MOVE!*

AND, IN ANOTHER SECOND, NEITHER OF YOU WILL BE ABLE TO *TALK*, AS WELL! AS I SAID, I AM HERE TO SEE YOUR *BOSS*--AND I HAVE NO DESIRE TO SEE HIM *FOREWARNED!*

THEN, WITHOUT A FURTHER WORD, THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURE MOVES ON, LEAVING BEHIND HIM TWO FORMS--SILENT, UNMOVING...

AS, ELSEWHERE IN THE DISGUISED HEADQUARTERS OF COUNT NEFARIA...

IT HAS *ARRIVED!* SOON ALL THE POWER, ALL THE GLORY FOR WHICH I HAVE LONGED--SHALL BE *MINE!*

I'VE BROUGHT YOU THE SPECIAL CERTIFICATES, COUNT! THEY'RE INSIDE THIS ***BRIEFCASE!***

I KNOW! I MONITORED YOUR MOVEMENTS ON MY ***VIEWSCREEN!***

GIVE IT TO ME! I HAVE STRIVEN LONG--PLANNED CAREFULLY--FOR THIS MOMENT!

NOT SO FAST, NEFARIA! FIRST, YOU MUST REMOVE YOUR ***CRYSTALLINE DOME*** FROM WASHINGTON--ONLY ***THEN*** WILL I HAND OVER THE BRIEF-CASE!

SHE'S USING HER MUTANT ***TELEKINETIC POWER*** TO HOLD ME BACK! I CAN'T OVERCOME HER BY ***FORCE***, SO I MUST DO AS SHE SAYS!

YOU ***WRONG*** ME, MARVEL GIRL! COUNT NEFARIA IS A MAN WHO ***KEEPS*** HIS BARGAINS!

NATURALLY, I ADJUSTED THE MACHINE SO THAT THE ELEMENTS IN THE DOME DID ***NOT*** DESTROY THE CITY'S OXYGEN!

BUT, BEFORE YOU ARRIVED, I ARRANGED THAT THE OXYGEN-DEPLETING PARTICLES WOULD BE ***REACTIVATED*** WITHIN FIVE MINUTES...

--***UNLESS*** I PRESS THE PROPER BUTTONS ***AT ONCE!*** SO, DELAY NO FURTHER! PLACE THE POUCH ON THE TABLE--OR AMERICA BECOMES A NATION WITH AN UNINHABI-TED ***CAPITAL!***

I HAVE NO ***CHOICE!*** I ***MUST*** TRUST HIM!

AT LAST, I HAVE IT! ENOUGH MONEY TO FINANCE MY WILDEST ***DREAMS!***

SOON, MY SMALL EUROPEAN NATION WILL BECOME THE CENTER OF THE NEW ***MAGGIA***--A WORLD'S CAPITAL OF ***CRIME!***

THAT ***STRANGER***--ENTERING SILENTLY, ALMOST LIKE A ***GHOST!***

WHO ***IS*** HE?

WITHOUT A WORD, THE OMINOUS, COMMANDING FIGURE STRIDES ACROSS THE ROOM, AND...

WHO--? THAT MAN--HE'S MANIPULATING THE CONTROLS OF MY ***DOME-PROJECTOR***--AS IF HE HAD ***DESIGNED*** THEM!

KLIK!

KLIK!

BUT, ***NO*** HUMAN BEING COULD DO SUCH A THING! THEY ARE TOO ***INTRICATE***, TOO ***DELICATE!***

THEN, AS A SURPRISED MARVEL GIRL'S MENTAL PROWESS HOLDS THE ENRAGED KINGPIN OF CRIME AT BAY, THE NEWCOMER CONTINUES TO PULL SWITCH AFTER SWITCH ON THE FANTASTIC APPARATUS...

STOP! YOU ***CAN'T!*** YOU ARE RUINING THE ULTRA-SENSITIVE PRINTED CIRCUITS OF THE MACHINE--DESTROYING THE CROWN-ING ACHIEVEMENT OF A ***LIFETIME!***

THIS INVENTION IS A MONUMENT TO ***EVIL!*** IT MUST NOT, AND ***SHALL*** NOT, ENDURE!

THAT VOICE--THE PROUD BEARING! COULD IT POSSIBLY ***BE***--?

BUT, BEFORE JEAN GREY CAN GIVE UTTERANCE TO HER THOUGHTS...

MARVEL GIRL! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

WE GOT HERE AS FAST AS WE COULD!

YES, I'M FINE! HOW DID YOU LOCATE NEFARIA'S HEADQUARTERS?

ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR LADY! ANGEL FOLLOWED THE TRUCK HERE, THEN CLUED US IN!

THANK THE STARS SHE'S UNHARMED! IF ANYTHING HAD HAPPENED TO HER--

BUT--WHERE'S NEFARIA? AND THE POUCH WITH THE CERTIFICATES?

RIGHT HERE! I--WHY, THEY'RE GONE! BOTH OF THEM!

THE COUNT MUST HAVE GRABBED THE MONEY AND FLED--JUST AS WE ENTERED THE WINDOW!

ALL OUR WORK--FOR NOTHING!

NO, ANGEL--NOT FOR NOTHING!

COUNT NEFARIA JUST BOARDED HIS SHIP DOWN BELOW, AND IS STARTING TO PULL AWAY FROM THE DOCK! BUT, THERE IS NO NEED FOR YOU TO CONCERN YOURSELVES WITH HIM FOR NOW!

MISTER, I DON'T MEAN TO BE RUDE--BUT WHO IN BLAZES ARE YOU?

NO, WAIT, WARREN! DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE HIM? HE--

LOOK! IN THE HARBOR --THE ONE KNOWN AS THE UNICORN!

THE MOST DANGEROUS OF NEFARIA'S CRONIES! LET US SEE--!

AND, GAZING ACROSS THE EVER-WIDENING DISTANCE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE COUNT'S VESSEL, THE ASTONISHED MUTANTS SEE...

IT'S UNICORN, ALL RIGHT! QUICKLY--WE MUST OVERTAKE THE SHIP BEFORE IT REACHES THE THREE-MILE LIMIT!

HAVE NO FEAR, X-MEN--

THE SHIP WILL NOT REACH INTERNATIONAL WATERS! I PROMISE YOU THAT!

THE MASKED FIGURE--IT'S PROFESSOR X! THE HOOD MUFFLED HIS VOICE!

BUT, SIR--YOU'RE WALKING! HOW--?

FOR MONTHS, I HAVE BEEN SECRETLY WORKING ON LIGHTWEIGHT, FLEXIBLE METAL BRACES FOR MY LEGS--AND, AT LAST, I HAVE NEARLY PERFECTED THEM!

THIS TRANSISTORIZED POWER SOURCE, HOOKED ONTO MY BELT, IS ALL THAT I NEED TO OPERATE THEM FOR SEVERAL HOURS AT A TIME!

THAT'S WONDERFUL NEWS, PROFESSOR! BUT, WHAT ABOUT NEFARIA AND THE UNICORN? SHOULDN'T WE CATCH UP WITH THEM AND RECOVER THE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS?

THAT WOULD BE A MOST LAUDABLE SUGGESTION, BOBBY--IF THEY HAD THE MONEY!

WHAT? YOU MEAN THEY DON'T?

NO! IF YOU'LL MERELY GLANCE UNDER THE TABLE, YOU'LL SEE--

THE BRIEFCASE! THEN, NEFARIA GOT AWAY--EMPTY-HANDED!

NOT EXACTLY, SCOTT--NOT EXACTLY!

AND NOW, TO LEARN THE MEANING OF XAVIER'S CRYPTIC STATEMENT, WE JOIN AN EXULTANT COUNT NEFARIA ABOARD HIS FLEEING VESSEL...

A HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS! WEALTH BEYOND THE IMAGININGS OF MOST MORTALS!

BUT, SOON THERE WILL BE MORE INGENIOUS CRIMES, MORE RICHES THAN ANYONE HAS EVER POSSESSED! THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING!

YOU ARE MISTAKEN, COUNT--THIS IS THE END OF YOUR CAREER!

FOR, THOUGH MY POWER HORN IS EXHAUSTED, I STILL POSSESS THE STRENGTH TO WREST THE POUCH FROM YOU!

UNICORN! DON'T--WAIT!

WE HAVE NO NEED FOR STRIFE! BEFORE US IS TREASURE ENOUGH FOR A THOUSAND MEN! WE--

WHAT WITCHCRAFT IS THIS?

THE BRIEFCASE IS FADING FROM SIGHT! AND WITH IT--OUR DREAMS OF WEALTH AND POWER! SOMEHOW, IN SOME WAY, THE X-MEN TRICKED US!

AS, BACK IN THE MAGGIA'S ABANDONED HEADQUARTERS...

AT ABOUT THIS TIME, NEFARIA AND THE UNICORN SHOULD BE DISCOVERING THAT I USED THE COUNT'S OWN MACHINE AGAINST THEM, CREATING A MENTAL IMAGE OF THE COVETED BRIEFCASE!

IN ADDITION, I ALERTED THE COAST GUARD--WHICH SHOULD HAVE THEM SAFELY IN TOW WITHIN FIVE MINUTES!

NOW, PERHAPS THE GENDARMES WILL STOP ACCOSTING US FOR THEIR CRIMES!

MEANWHILE, JEAN, THIS LETTER ARRIVED FOR YOU THIS MORNING...

FOR ME?

THEN, AS THE FEMININE MEMBER OF THE UNIQUE TEAM OPENS THE ENVELOPE AND BEGINS TO READ, A STRANGE HUSH FALLS OVER THE MUTANT SUPER-HEROES...

JEAN--IS SOMETHING WRONG? IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WE CAN DO?

NO, WARREN--NOTHING!

IF IT'S TROUBLE, LET US SHARE IT!

NO, SCOTT! IT'S JEAN WHO MUST DECIDE IF WE CAN HELP HER--NOT WE OURSELVES!

IT'S ALL RIGHT, PROFESSOR! IT ISN'T SOMETHING I CAN HIDE FOR LONG--MUCH AS I MIGHT WISH TO!

TOMORROW, I MUST LEAVE THE X-MEN--FOREVER!

NEXT ISH:

MORE STARTLINGLY DIFFERENT, AMAZINGLY IMAGINATIVE DEVELOPMENTS, AS THE MOST UNUSUAL FIGHTING TEAM OF ALL TIME BATTLES

THE LOCUST!

AND, IF THAT ISN'T 'NUFF SAID--WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IS!

MINUTEMEN

Blunt

Brian Azzarello